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SUBJECT: UNSC MEETS AT SAUDI/ARAB LEAGUE REQUEST

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The UN Security Council met September 26 in response to the request by Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab League to discuss Israeli settlement activity. The Saudi FM spoke first and accused Israel of intransigence and a lack of good faith in dealing with the settlements issue. Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa also protested Israeli settlements policy which he said contributed to making a viable future Palestinian state a "mere mirage." The PA President said Israeli settlements cut the West Bank into cantons and changed the configuration of Jerusalem, but swore he would never cease to negotiate. The Israeli Perm Rep said that settlements were not the major issue as they had never been an obstacle to peace for Israel and cited terrorism as "this century's Black Plague."

¶2. (SBU) The Secretary stressed the strong USG commitment to achieving a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians and called on the international community to support the parties to that end. She urged the international community to speak out against terrorism and stated that the Council should take up the matter of one member of the UN (Iran) calling for the destruction of another member (Israel). The European states on the Council largely stressed both parties' obligations and briefly touched on settlements, as did Costa Rica, China, Vietnam, Panama, and Burkina Faso. Conversely, Libya, Indonesia, and South Africa focused their statements exclusively on Israeli settlement activity. End summary.

¶3. (SBU) The Security Council met for a formal meeting September 26 in response to the request by Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab League to discuss Israeli settlement activity. The Council first heard briefings from Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa, and PLO Chairman/PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and a response from Israeli Perm Rep Gabriela Shalev. The Presidency then opened the floor to remarks from Security Council members.

Saudi Arabia

¶4. (SBU) Saudi FM Prince Saud al-Faisal opened the session by accusing Israel of intransigence and an absence of good faith in dealing with the settlements issue, accusing the Israeli government of humiliating the Palestinian people and changing the geographic and demographic facts on the ground. Continued construction in East Jerusalem makes it "virtually impossible" to envision the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, he continued, and called upon Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity. "The only true path to Israel's security is peace," said Saud, adding that "the moment for serious action is upon us." He described the peace process as being in "stagnation," and characterized Palestinian anger and frustration as reaching serious levels. He concluded by noting that he was not asking for any action from the Council now, but said the meeting should remain

"open" until the issue has been resolved.

Arab League

15. (SBU) Arab League chair Amr Moussa began by recalling the September 2006 Security Council meeting convened at the Arab League's request to reinvigorate the peace process, with the goal of reaching a comprehensive peace, and most of whose goals have not been achieved. He said he had "hoped the Syrians and Lebanese would have a voice in this meeting." He accused Israel of lacking the political will to accept a viable Palestinian state equal to Israel, saying Israel has refused to put anything in writing and simply wants to hold more meetings. He noted that the Annapolis requirements of stopping settlement construction and removing illegal outposts have not been met. If this situation continues, Moussa said, it will have serious repercussions for peace, since Israel continues to build settlements and change the demographic facts on the ground. He was dismissive of Israeli-Syrian indirect talks facilitated by Turkey, and held out little hope, due to Israeli intransigence. This situation has made the possibility of a viable Palestinian state a "mere mirage," Moussa protested. The Arab League continues to abide by the terms of its peace initiative, he declared, and called on Israel to reconsider the Arab peace offer and to cease its settlement policy. The situation also requires an "honest broker," he added. (Note: Both Saud and Moussa threatened to come back to the Council for a "product" if no progress is made on settlements. End note.)

PLO/PA

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16. (SBU) PA President Mahmoud Abbas focused his entire remarks on settlements and their impact on the peace process, though he swore that he would never cease to negotiate for peace. Using PLO Negotiations Affairs Department maps (which were circulated to SC members during the briefing), he called into question the three settlement blocks of Ariel, Ma'ale Adumim, and Efrat which divide the West Bank into four different cantons and jeopardize the creation of a viable Palestinian state. While phase one of the Roadmap calls for a definitive end to Israel's settlement policy, he said, the "policy persists to the banks of the Jordan river." He questioned how he could continue to negotiate if these settlement policies continue. He called on the Quartet to closely track the implementation of the Roadmap. He opined that even the Israeli government considers some of the settlements illegal, though they continue. He cited French President Sarkozy and Secretary Rice's interventions on the issue which have not received a positive response. On Jerusalem, he said that all previous agreements have stipulated that there should be no change to the configuration of the city, though the Israeli government does not enforce these agreements with the Jerusalem mayor. He lamented the active aggression by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian population. Nevertheless, he said, "I am ready to pursue negotiations. I will never cease to negotiate. But, how can resolutions not be heeded?"

Israel

17. (SBU) Israeli Perm Rep Gabriela Shalev, in her first appearance before the Council, said that if a stranger was seated at the table he would falsely think that settlements were the major concern on the ground, not terrorism or the threats posed to peace and security by Hamas, Hizballah, or Iran. She said that negotiations were continuing on the ground, as they should be, and not through the Security Council. She reiterated Israel's commitment to a two-state solution and said "the question was not whether to achieve it but how." She stressed that Israel was ready to make painful

concessions and that settlements would not be an obstacle to peace. Shalev called on the Arab world to play a pivotal role in supporting a moderate PA; condemn toxic statements, like those made by the Iranian President; and recognize Israel's right to exist. She said that Israel understands its obligations to peace and security in the region. She called for efforts to be made to confront all obstacles on the ground and build confidence. She described terrorism as "this century's Black Plague." Shalev reiterated President Peres' offer in his speech to the General Assembly to hold a peace talks in Jerusalem with all interested Arab states. She stressed that progress towards peace would be made through bilateral meetings, such as the Peres-Abbas meeting earlier that morning, not by meetings in fora like the Security Council.

U.S.

18. (SBU) The Secretary listened to the two parties and the French FM before delivering her intervention. She stressed her commitment and the President's to finding lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. She described how a year ago there was no serious peace process but today there is one, despite the complications. She listed the bilateral meetings that had taken place this week alone, including the Peres-Abbas meeting earlier that morning, Foreign Minister Livni's meeting with Abu Ala'a September 23, President Bush's meeting with President Abbas September 25, and her own meeting later that day with President Abbas. She noted the Quartet meetings that afternoon and the Quartet's role as the appropriate forum for such issues. She said that the Annapolis process calls for not just negotiations but progress on the ground and the fulfillment of Roadmap obligations, and the U.S. continues to press both parties to that end.

19. (SBU) She called on the international community to support the parties in their bilateral negotiations; to insist that the parties live up to their Roadmap obligations; and to provide financial assistance to the PA so that it can provide services to its people. She cited the historic levels of U.S. assistance, including direct budgetary support. The Secretary called on regional states to fulfill their assistance pledges to the PA. Noting the Arab Peace Initiative, she asked regional states to reach out to Israel since a comprehensive solution requires that Israel be a valued partner in the Middle East. She urged the international community to speak out against terrorism and

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said that the taking of innocent human life is never acceptable. The Secretary ended by stating that the Council should be discussing the Iranian president's statement before the General Assembly earlier in the week. She said, "The U.S. will be asking that the Council convene again to take up the matter of one member of the UN calling for the destruction of another member of the UN in a way that simply should not be allowed."

European states stress
both parties' obligations

110. (SBU) The French FM quoted President Sarkozy's June 23 statement to the Knesset that there will be no peace without a total halt to settlement activity but then recalled the Iranian President's UNGA speech, describing it as "an unacceptable message before the General Assembly." He stressed the need to combat terrorism, welcomed the truce in Gaza, and said there would be no security for Israel without a democratic Palestinian state and no security for the world without peace in the Middle East. The Belgian FM termed settlements in East Jerusalem as illegal, so it was important to have a discussion in the Security Council but that it could not be restricted to one issue. He said the

negotiations launched at Annapolis must lead to a peace agreement for an independent and viable Palestinian state to guarantee coexistence and peace to both Palestinians and Israelis. He noted the security progress in the West Bank, called for Israel to lift movement and access restrictions, and said the Gaza truce must not be an end in itself but lead to a better situation for all Gazans.

¶11. (SBU) The Italian FM, in the strongest European statement, said that both parties must be encouraged to proceed since the clock is ticking against peace. He considered Israel's security as non-negotiable; that the Palestinian state needs solid institutions upon which it can be built; and that Arab states must continue to provide support. He said the Israeli settlement process does not facilitate the peace process and Israeli political leaders must come to a more satisfactory solution. He welcomed President Abbas' commitment to the peace process and saluted Egypt for its role negotiating the Gazan truce. Turning to Lebanon, he voiced concern for the resurgence of violence. He said he hoped there would one day be Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli peace and that Syria would one day be a helpful international actor. He ended by noting the serious threat posed by Iran.

¶12. (SBU) The British State Secretary noted the progress to date with the two parties talking, the cease-fire holding, reform ongoing in the PA, and security progress in the West Bank. He urged the Quartet to issue a strong message later that day, called for support for both sides, and noted that all parties must support progress for peace. He, too, noted the "grievous comments" by the Iranian president and said it was no way to talk about another member state. The Croatian FM in a short statement said there had been solid and substantive progress during the year but more needed to be done. He termed the present a "crucial time for the peace process."

Libya, Indonesia, and South Africa
only focus on settlements

¶13. (SBU) The Libyan Perm Rep gave a long intervention focused exclusively on settlements and chastised the Council for not being able to agree during the year on a Presidential statement "no matter how grave the situation." He described the morning session as the first time a group of states asked only for the opportunity to be heard. The Indonesian FM also focused his statement on the negative effects of settlements and the unlawful acts of settlers. The South African FM cited the Fourth Geneva Convention before reiterating the Roadmap language on freezing settlements and dismantling outposts. She described the situation on the ground as not having improved significantly since Annapolis. She said positive political progress must result in progress on the ground.

Costa Rica, China, Vietnam, Panama,
and Burkina Faso focus more broadly

¶14. (SBU) The Costa Rican FM referenced resolution 181, which calls for the creation of two states, and described it as a tragedy that the Palestinian state was never created back when the state of Israel was founded. The FM noted the various delays in the founding of the Palestinian state, but

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said the PA was taking on the features of a state and that was why Costa Rica had recognized it as such in February. He noted that neither of the parties has done everything it should have and called for the participation of the Arab states in the chamber to play an active role in facilitating the peace process. The Chinese Deputy Pol Counselor reiterated China's "ardent hope to see progress" and said it was imperative that the talks produce results. Noting that

the talks are not conducted in a vacuum, he voiced concern for the Gaza humanitarian situation and Israel's settlement expansion. He called for neither side to wait for the other side to take the first step in meeting its Roadmap obligations and called for the Quartet to help accelerate the negotiating process. He said the Security Council could and should play an important role.

¶15. (SBU) The Vietnamese Perm Rep echoed the UN Secretary-General's statements that settlement activities are contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Roadmap. He noted UN Special Coordinator for the Peace Process Serry's comments before the Council September 18 that the peace process was at a crossroads and called for the parties to work together and take reciprocal steps. The Panamanian Perm Rep recognized the importance of the meeting and described the situation as more complex than one single issue, though settlements do violate the rights of one party and called for their halt. The Burkinabe FM who chaired the meeting said encouraging signs are emerging and we need to transform will into success. He called for greater effort from both sides, terming it in the interest of everyone in the Middle East. Khalilzad